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RESULTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

(Background paper prepared by the United Nations for the twenty-seventh series of Joint Meetings of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Administrative Committee on Coordination)

INTRODUCTION

1. The results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development are having a profound and far-reaching effect on the programmes and priorities of the organizations of the United Nations system. Currently, they are undertaking an intensive review of their work programmes, reordering their priorities and shifting resources wherever feasible in order to concentrate on assisting countries in meeting key objectives of Agenda 21 in their respective areas of competence.

2. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) has placed issues related to the follow-up to the Conference high on its agenda. At its first regular session of 1992, ACC established a Task Force on Environment and Development, which made comprehensive recommendations for the follow-up to the Conference by the United Nations system. On the basis of these recommendations, ACC, at its second regular session of 1992, adopted a statement (ACC/1992/32, para. 5) for consideration by the General Assembly in which ACC (a) identified principles and guidelines for the allocation and sharing of

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* E/1993/120.

responsibilities within the United Nations system for the implementation of Agenda 21; (b) suggested ways of enhancing cooperation between the multilateral funding institutions and other United Nations system organizations; (c) addressed the issue of financial requirements of the system for the implementation of Agenda 21; and (d) outlined the arrangements for cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system for the follow-up of the Conference.

3. During the course of the past year, the ACC subsidiary machinery and other inter-agency coordination arrangements have been streamlined and simplified considerably to achieve greater complementarity and synergy in giving practical shape to programme areas of Agenda 21. In accordance with the recommendations of the Task Force on Environment and Development, ACC has established an Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), at a senior level, with the mandate to launch a process of inter-agency consultations for Conference follow-up, with a view to assisting ACC in streamlining the coordinating machinery, allocating and sharing responsibilities for Agenda 21 implementation by the United Nations system; monitoring new and additional financing requirements of United Nations system organizations related to Agenda 21, taking into account the decisions of their governing bodies; and assessing new and existing reporting requirements related to the implementation of Agenda 21 and making recommendations for their streamlining. IACSD has met twice to review the activities of the organizations of the United Nations system, with a view to enhancing inter-agency coordination and developing an effective response to Agenda 21.

4. In its statement to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its first session, ACC brought three key issues to its attention, namely, allocation and sharing of responsibilities for the implementation of Agenda 21, coordination of the United Nations system and financing (see the annual overview report of ACC for 1992 (E/1993/81), para. 33, for the full text of the ACC statement to the Commission).

5. Under the agenda item entitled "Progress in the incorporation of recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in the activities of international organizations, and measures undertaken by the Administrative Committee on Coordination to ensure that sustainable development principles are incorporated in programmes and processes within the United nations system", the Commission adopted a number of recommendations on matters related to inter-agency coordination, cooperation and reporting. 1/ The decisions and recommendations of the Commission were subsequently endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1993/314.

6. The present paper draws the attention of the Joint Meeting to a number of issues recently addressed by ACC and its IACSD and by the Commission on Sustainable Development which are of particular relevance to the Committee for Programme and Development, as the main subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in the area of programme planning and coordination.

I. MATTERS RELATED TO COORDINATION

7. The Administrative Committee on Coordination, with a view to achieving more effective coordination at the country and regional levels, as well as to developing closer coordination and cooperation among agencies around specific issues and programmes, is currently undertaking the following measures:

(a) At the field level

(i) Inter-agency coordination structures are taking into full account national and regional objectives of Agenda 21. Furthermore, in accordance with the request of the Commission on Sustainable Development, relevant organizations of the United Nations system are ready to discuss with Governments matters related to the provision of technical and financial assistance to countries, particularly developing countries, in the preparation of their periodic communications or national reports on progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of Agenda 21, as well as in the preparation of their national Agenda 21 action plans;

(ii) Preliminary actions have been initiated to assist countries in the formulation of national sustainable development strategies.

(b) At the international level

(i) Each organization of the system will continue the review of its programming and budgetary processes in the light of the thematic clusters of Agenda 21, included in the multi-year programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, with a view to reordering priorities and reorienting existing activities, identifying additional or new activities that should be carried out in response to Agenda 21, and the corresponding financial requirements, and indicating arrangements for cooperation and coordination with other agencies. Relevant proposals will be brought to the attention of respective governing bodies within the United Nations system;

(ii) ACC, through its Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, will continue the elaboration of measures aimed at achieving greater complementarity of activities, identifying gaps, areas of unnecessary duplication of effort or opportunities for cooperation. This work will be done on the basis of proposals and recommendations of the task managers for coordination and joint programming designated within the framework of IACSD from organizations of the United Nations system, in accordance with the decisions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination at its first regular session of 1993.

8. ACC will continue to inform the Commission on Sustainable Development and, through it, the Economic and Social Council, on measures taken and progress achieved in formulating an effective and coordinated system-wide response to the follow-up of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

9. At its first session, the Commission recognized the crucial role of ACC in ensuring effective monitoring, coordination and supervision of the involvement

of the United Nations system in the follow-up of the Conference. The Commission supported the recent decisions of ACC to place the Conference follow-up issues high on its agenda and to undertake measures to streamline and reorganize its subsidiary machinery and other inter-agency coordination arrangements to achieve greater complementarity and synergy in giving practical shape to the programme areas of Agenda 21.

10. The Commission on Sustainable Development recognized the need for further enhancing inter-agency coordination in the United Nations system to ensure more cost-efficient, effective and result-oriented follow-up to the Conference, to avoid duplication and to ensure more efficient use of resources in the implementation of Agenda 21.

11. In this context, the Commission called upon all countries to maintain consistent positions in various governing bodies in order to achieve greater harmonization of policy direction within the system in relation to the implementation of Agenda 21 and other decisions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The Commission emphasized its readiness to collaborate with the governing bodies of the United Nations system in harmonizing collective efforts towards the implementation of Agenda 21.

12. The Commission invited all international organizations, including international financial institutions, to undertake further measures to fully incorporate the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in their work programmes, and to provide it with further reports on their activities to follow-up the Conference, focusing on the clusters of its multi-year thematic programme of work. 2/

13. The Commission decided to consider these reports together with the reports on relevant activities of international, regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations outside the United Nations system, with a view to elaborating policy recommendations aimed at ensuring effective collaboration and greater complementarity of activities of intergovernmental organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system.

14. At its second session, held in New York from 8 to 10 September 1993, IACSD was apprised of the recommendations of the Commission. Arrangements have been worked out for the allocation of responsibilities to organizations as task managers for coordinated follow-up to the various chapters and programme areas of Agenda 21. Task managers will, inter alia, have the following responsibilities:

(a) In collaboration with other relevant organizations, task managers will provide coordinated technical inputs on United Nations system-wide implementation of Agenda 21 in specific areas in accordance with the multi-year thematic programme of work established by the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(b) In the area of information exchange, task managers will strengthen and, where necessary, establish a network of collaboration among the relevant organizations and develop a regular flow of information on ongoing and future activities among them, including through E-mail networks;

(c) Task managers will have the related responsibility of initiating and playing a catalytic function in joint activities and programmes relating to thematic issues;

(d) Task managers will develop, in collaboration with concerned organizations and the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development, common strategies for United Nations system implementation of Agenda 21 for the specific issues in their respective areas of competence, and identify policy issues and further actions required;

(e) Task managers will prepare, in collaboration with concerned organizations, coordinated inputs for the consolidated analytical report of the Secretary-General, which will focus on common United Nations system strategies for the implementation of Agenda 21 and identify areas for further action for consideration by the Commission on Sustainable Development.

15. Another issue to which IACSD has devoted its attention is the coordination of programmes related to development data and formulation of proposals regarding Development Watch, envisaged in paragraph 40.13 of Agenda 21. Detailed information on the inter-agency process launched in this field was brought to the attention of the Commission on Sustainable Development in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.17/1993/9). At its first session, the Commission took note of the processes launched within the United Nations system to improve the coordination of programmes related to development data, and requested the Secretary-General, with the assistance of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, to continue to formulate proposals regarding Development Watch, as well as the elaboration of realistic, usable and easily understandable indicators that would allow the Commission to assess the progress made towards sustainable development.

16. Some organizations have already been working on sustainable development indicators and projects and forecasting. Furthermore, it may be noted that The Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis of the United Nations Secretariat, jointly with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is planning to convene a meeting of key organizations dealing with environmental indicators. The meeting is scheduled to take place in early December 1993 to discuss the development of widely agreed environmental/sustainable development indicators for different users at the national and international levels. Consideration also needs to be given to a coordinated capacity for projections and forecasting of future trends, with a view to taking preventive action.

Coordination among intergovernmental bodies

17. At its first session, the Commission on Sustainable Development emphasized the need for effective interaction and collaborative arrangements with intergovernmental bodies which are of special relevance to the work of the Commission in relation to promoting and facilitating the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, cooperation and capacity-building, such as with the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, the Trade and Development Board of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Commission on Transnational Corporations and the Governing Councils of UNEP, the

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization. For this purpose, the Commission invited the Economic and Social Council to consider the intergovernmental machinery related to science and technology in the coordination segment of its substantive session of 1994, with a view to clarifying the distribution of labour and coordination mechanisms.

18. The theme of the coordination segment will be determined by the Council at its organizational session for 1994. The organizations of the system expressed their readiness to contribute fully to the deliberations of the Council on this matter.

II. MATTERS RELATED TO FINANCING

19. Financing remains a major constraint for practically all the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations in the implementation of Agenda 21. The two interrelated aspects of this issue, namely, how to achieve greater cost-effectiveness and efficiency to achieve maximum impact and the need for additional resources, deserve attention. As noted earlier, ACC and its IACSD have devoted considerable attention to the financing requirements of the system relating to the follow-up of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In its statement to the General Assembly (ACC/1992/32), ACC noted the recognition, in Agenda 21, that financial resources are also required for strengthening the capacity of United Nations institutions for the implementation of Agenda 21 and that the provision of new and additional financial resources should be both adequate and predictable. It further noted that it will be up to the secretariats and governing bodies of United Nations system organizations to assess their respective additional financial requirements related to the implementation of Agenda 21.

20. ACC urged that, taking into account these assessments of requirements, zero-growth budgetary policies be relaxed in order to enable the relevant parts of the United Nations system to play their full role in the implementation of Agenda 21. Similarly, the timely and full payment of contributions and all arrears would enable organizations to re-establish their full programme delivery capacities.

21. At the same time, ACC stressed the imperative need to provide supplementary resources to relevant United Nations system organizations. For, although all organizations are committed to implementing the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to the extent possible within existing resources, the provision of additional funds will be a conditio sine qua non for their full and effective response to the new demands generated by Agenda 21 (including those for inter-agency coordination and cooperation). ACC also strongly supported the replenishment of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) in 1993 and the financing of UNDP's Capacity 21, since both would provide resources for the implementation of part of Agenda 21.

22. At its first session, the Commission on Sustainable Development urged international financial institutions, regional and subregional banks and specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as other institutions involved in the implementation of Agenda 21, to play an increased and more effective role in providing new and additional financial

resources, in particular to developing countries, for the implementation of Agenda 21, to make greater progress in integrating the concept of sustainable development into their programmes and projects and to make it an integral part of their decision-making process and institutional objectives.

23. The Commission also invited the World Bank and other international, regional and subregional financial and development institutions, including the Global Environmental Facility and all specialized agencies and related organizations of the United Nations system, in accordance with paragraph 21 of General Assembly resolution 47/191, to include in their reports to the Commission information regarding their experience, activities and plans to implement Agenda 21, in particular those related to the provisions of paragraph 33.14 (a) and (b).

24. The Commission took note of the concerns expressed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination regarding the lack of funding to meet the new mandates stemming from Agenda 21, and, in the context of its decision on finance, requested the Economic and Social Council to invite all organizations and programmes of the United Nations system to provide to the Commission at its second session, through the Administrative Committee on Coordination, information regarding their financial needs and priorities that are relevant to their specific responsibilities, taking into account the system-wide perspective in the implementation of Agenda 21 and other outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, as it is developed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination and its Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, bearing in mind agreed objectives reflected in Agenda 21, in particular chapter 33 on the provision of financial resources to achieve sustainable development.

25. In the light of the above, the Commission invited States members of the governing bodies of the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system and multilateral, regional and subregional development banks and funds dealing with issues of environment and development to take steps to ensure that the programme budgets of those institutions receive adequate financial support in order for them to implement the provisions of Agenda 21 according to their respective mandates.

26. The IACSD has continued to monitor financing requirements of organizations of the United Nations system relating to Agenda 21, taking into account the decisions of their governing bodies. In that context, emphasis has been placed on the importance of organizations of the system to be more involved in the definition and design of strategies, programmes and activities to be implemented at the country level. The particular concerns of small organizations that are not represented at the country level should be stressed in this regard. Increased use of round tables and consultative group meetings by UNDP and the World Bank to better integrate financing of economic development and environmental action plans and strategies is envisaged. UNDP's Capacity 21 and sustainable development networks could be useful mechanisms for coordinating inputs of specialized agencies in these forums. Similar processes at the regional level are also envisaged.

27. The Inter-Agency Committee noted with appreciation that, in response to the concern expressed in the statement of ACC to the Commission on Sustainable

Development at its first session regarding the need for additional funding to meet the new mandates stemming from Agenda 21, the Commission had recognized the important role of entities within the United Nations system and had requested them to provide to the Commission at its second session, through ACC, information regarding financial needs and priorities that are relevant to their respective responsibilities.

28. IACSD once again stressed the need for additional financing to carry out the new mandates emanating from Agenda 21. The reordering of priorities and the reallocation of resources which was already taking place could not meet all the requirements of Agenda 21. While noting that the financing needs of individual organizations would be reviewed by their respective governing bodies in the context of their regular budgets, the Committee considered that, in particular, activities and programmes that involved more than one agency would require additional funding. Such needs could be reported to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

III. PROGRAMME QUESTIONS

29. The current United Nations medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, as well as the medium-term plans of other organizations, do not fully reflect the new long-term legislative mandates arising from Agenda 21 and the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, as well as recent decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as approved by the Economic and Social Council. Detailed proposals of the Secretary-General regarding the required revisions to the programmes and subprogrammes of the medium-term plan will be submitted to the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-fourth session in accordance with established procedures. These proposals will take into account decisions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination aimed at ensuring effective division of labour and complementarity of efforts within the United Nations system to follow-up the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

30. In this regard, a question that is of system-wide relevance is: at what level should the organizations set their objectives and programme activities? The level of programming will depend not only on a reordering of priorities and reallocation of existing resources, but also on the expectations about the availability of additional resources. An approach that has bene used in other instances is that of having a core programme based on available resources as well as supplementary programmes that could be carried out should additional resources become available.

IV. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

31. In the light of the above, the following issues might be usefully reviewed at the Joint Meeting:

(a) Harmonizing collective efforts within the United Nations system towards the implementation of Agenda 21, including the role of relevant governing bodies;

(b) Interaction and collaborative arrangements between intergovernmental bodies dealing with issues related to promoting and facilitating the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, cooperation and capacity-building;

(c) Financial requirements of the organizations of the United Nations system to implement Agenda 21, including implications of zero-growth and overprogramming.

Notes

1/ See report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on its first session (E/1993/25/Add.1).

2/ The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its first session, approved its multi-year thematic programme of work for the period 1993-1997. This programme integrates 40 chapters of Agenda 21 in the following nine thematic clusters: (a) critical elements of sustainability; (b) financial resources and mechanisms; (c) education, science, transfer of environmentally sound technologies, cooperation and capacity-building; (d) decision-making structures; (e) roles of major groups; (f) health, human settlements and freshwater; (g) land, desertification, forests and biodiversity; (h) atmosphere, oceans and all kinds of seas; (i) toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes. The Commission has decided that clusters (a) to (e), which are broadly cross-sectoral in nature, will be considered by the Commission annually, while clusters (f) to (i), which are broadly sectoral in nature, will be considered on a multi-year basis. These clusters will be considered by the Commission in the course of 1994-1996, to be followed by a comprehensive review in 1997 to prepare for a special session of the General Assembly envisaged for that year.